

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PORT AU PRINCE 3653

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT SHUM PINS HA
SUBJ: DUVALIERIST ANNIVERSARY: EVOLUTION OF PRESS FREEDOM

REF: PORT AU PRINCE 3594

SUMMARY: ANSWERING PRESIDENT DUVALIER'S FREQUENT INVITATIONS TO A NATIONAL DIALOGUE, OUTSPOKEN INTELLECTUAL WEEKLY LE PETIT SAMEDI SOIR SEPTEMBER 17 HONORED THOSE WHO DIED FIGHTING FOR AND THOSE WHO DIED FIGHTING AGAINST THE DUVALIERIST REVOLUTION. THIS PROVOKED A BLISTERING RESPONSE FROM OFFICIAL DAILY LE NOUVEAU MONDE. ON SEPTEMBER 23 THE WEEKLY STRUCK AGAIN, USING STILL BOLDER LANGUAGE AND SUGGESTING THAT THE DAILY'S EDITOR IS OUT OF STEP WITH THE NEWLY PROCLAIMED "JEAN-CLAUDISTE" POLICY OF OPENNESS AND UNITY. THE JOURNALISTIC SLUGFEST MARKS A NEW MILESTONE IN THE ACCELERATING EVOLUTION OF PRESS FREEDOM IN HAITI AND POSES A CHALLENGE TO CONSERVATIVE GOH ELEMENTS WHO PREFER A GO-SLOW POLICY. IT ALSO CHALLENGES THE PRESIDENT TO MAKE GOOD ON HIS SEPTEMBER 22 ANNIVERSARY SPEECH OF RECONCILIATION. IT MAY BE TOO EARLY TO TELL IF THE PARTIALLY GOH-SUBSIDIZED ESTABLISHMENT PRESS WILL FOLLOW WITH BOLDER LANGUAGE;
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BUT OUTSPOKEN WEEKLY JEUNE PRESSE AND THE TRADITIONALLY MORE INDEPENDENT RADIO STATIONS WILL BE INCLINED TO IMITATE PSS. COMING ONLY WEEKS AFTER ANDREW YOUNG'S VISIT AND IN THE CONTEXT OF 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS, THE FIGHT IS ON AND PROPONENTS OF A FREE PRESS SEEM TO HAVE THE ADVANTAGE. END SUMMARY.

1. A SEPTEMBER 17 PSS EDITORIAL CALLED ON HAITIANS TO REMEMBER THOSE WHO DIED IN DEFENSE OF THE DUVALIERIST REVOLUTION AND THOSE WHO DIED OR WERE EXILED FOR OPPOSING IT. EDITOR DIEUDONNE FARDIN, INVOLING THE "HAITIAN FAMILY UNITY" THEME OF THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY, SAID THAT WHILE OTHERS TREMBLED IN FEAR, "THE OPPONENTS OF THE REGIME OF DUVALIER DIED ABROAD, IN EXILE, IN PRISON OR ON THE FIELD OF HONOR IN CONFRONTING THE FORCES OF POWER. THEY DARED AND THEY PAID WITH THEIR LIVES FOR THEIR REFUSAL TO SWALLOW CERTAIN ACTS OF THE DUVALIERS..... THEY ARE HEROES. THEY MADE IN FIRST STIDES IN THIS POLICY OF OPENNESS OF WHICH WE ARE TODAY REAPING THE FRUITS. THANKS TO THOSE WHO SAID NO (WHILE OTHERS APPLAUDED OUT OF FEAR), FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND EXPRESSION ARE WHAT THEY ARE TODAY IN HAITI." FARDIN ALSO ASKED READERS TO REMEMBER DR. DUVALIER AND HIS PARTISANS WHO DIED, CONCLUDING WITH "MAY THEY REST IN PEACE."

2. ON SEPTEMBER 19 OFFICIAL DAILY LE NOUVEAU MONDE EDITOR ULRICK SAINT-LOUIS SAID THE PAPER WOULD HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL AFTER THE CELEBRATION TO PROPERLY ANSWER "THESE BEDROOM STRATEGISTS, THESE PSUEDO-LIBERALS, THESE CHAMELEONS WHO CALL THEMSELVES MARXISTS, COMMUNISTS, WHOSE HEART IS TO THE LEFT AND THEIR POCKETS ON THE RIGHT AND WHO BEG FOR FAVORS FROM ALL THE EMBASSIES AND INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ESTABLISHED IN PORT AU PRINCE." CONFIDENTIAL

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SAINT-LOUIS REFERRED TO OPPONENTS OF THE REGIME AS "SUB-HUMANS ...REJECTS OF THE HAITIAN SPECIES WHO HAVE NO RIGHT TO NATIONAL RECOGNITION." HE CONCLUDED THAT "SINCE WE ARE CELEBRATING, IF YOU WANT POLEMICS--GIVEN THE FACT THAT PRESS FREEDOM IS GRANTED--FOR SUCH A SACRED CAUSE WE ACCEPT WITH PLEASURE WHATEVER MAY COME AFTER SEPTEMBER 23."

3. PPS COUNTERED SEPTEMBER 24 WITH FIVE ARTICLES AND EDITORIALS CONGRATULATING THE REGIME FOR THE POLITICAL PRISONER RELEASE, DEFENDING THE WEEKLY'S EARLIER EDITORIAL, AND ACCUSING SAINT-LOUIS OF DISTORTIONS. AGAIN REFERRING TO CHANGE UNDER JEAN-CLAUDE, IT SAID THAT "HENCEFORTH MR. DUVALIER SHOULD ENTER A REAL RACE AGAINST TIME IF HE IS NOT TO BE CAUGHT SHORT BY A COMMOTION WHICH HE DELIBERATELY BROUGHT ABOUT." FARDIN PRAISED THE PRESIDENT AS A MAN "CAPABLE OF SHAKING OFF THE VESTIGES OF THE PAST TO CONSOLIDATE THE PRESENT AND BUILD THE FUTURE."

4. TURNING TO SAINT-LOUIS, FARDIN OBSERVED THAT WHILE HIS ADVERSARY "IS NOT OBLIGED TO SHARE MY OPINION, THE DAYS WHEN HIS WAS THE ONLY ACCEPTABLE ONE ARE HAPPILY NO MORE." PSS

CALLED SAINT-LOUIS AN "ORTHODOX BARON OF DUVALIERISM WHOSE
BEHAVIOR DENOTES AN UNDISCIPLINED MILITANT LACKING IN
GRANDEUR. HE CRIES OUT FOR VENGEANCE, HE THREATENS, HE
RESURRECTS A PAST DURING WHICH MISTAKES WERE MADE
BY ALL; BUT MR. DUVALIER EXTENDS AN OLIVE BRANCH AND
INVITES ALL TO A RECONCILIATION FOR THE GREAT ECONOMIC
STRUGGLE OF UNITY. I WILL NOT, LIKE THE EDITORIALIST
(OF LE NOUVEAU MONDE), PROFFER INVECTIVE BY REMINDING
HIM THAT HIS HANDS ARE STILL RED WITH THE BLOOD OF HIS
COLLEAGUES OF YESTERDAY...." FARDIN THEN DEFENDED THE
INTEGRITY OF HIS JOURNAL AND STAFF, MAINTAINING THAT
UNLIKE SAINT-LOUIS, "WE ARE NOT THE ONES WHO JUST RETURNED
FROM AN OFFICIAL TRIP TO TAIWAN AND ISRAEL IN PAYMENT FOR
SERVICES RENDERED."
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5. FARDIN CONCLUDED HIS MAJOR EDITORIAL BY STATING: "WE
UNDERSTAND THE HASTE OF THE EDITORIALIST TO LAY DOWN HIS
LAST CARDS IN DESPERATION. HE IS AFRAID. HE IS TO BE PITIED.
THIS TACTIC OF CALLING AN ADVERSARY A MARXIST TO MAKE HIM
KEEP HIS MOUTH SHUT IS OUTMODED. THOSE ARE THE KINDS OF
STEPS WHICH NOT TOO LONG AGO CAUSED SO MUCH HARM TO THE
COUNTRY IN DENYING IT ITS BEST CADRES, THOSE WHO DIED IN
PRISONS, IN EXILE, VICTIMS OF FALSE ACCUSATIONS OF
FLATTERERS OF ALL COLORS. THIS PERFIDIOUS PRACTICE MUST STOP.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 PORT AU PRINCE 3653

THIS SPECIES OF SHAMELESS, BACKWARD AND PETTY POLITICIANS MUST BE UNMASKED. WE MUST DENOUNCE THE HARM THEY DO TO THE COUNTRY AND ITS YOUTH IN ORDER THAT THE TIME FOR DIALOGUE, PEACE AND PROGRESS MAY BE TRULY FRUITFUL." ANOTHER EDITORIAL ENTITLED "ARBITRATION OF LIBERTY" AND ARTICLES BY COLLABORATORS USED SIMILARLY STRONG LANGUAGE TO RIDICULE THE EDITOR OF THE OFFICIAL DAILY AND DEFEND THE PROFESSIONAL HONESTY OF PSS. AND THE PAPER INCLUDED A FULL SUMMARY OF THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE SEPTEMBER 8-13 CARIBBEAN COMMONWEALTH CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS WHICH TOOK PLACE IN BARBADOS.

6. FARDIN'S STRONG LANGUAGE IS UNPRECEDENTED. HE PUBLICLY CHALLENGED AND REPUDIATED A STAUNCH DUVALIERIST WHO IS NOT ONLY THE DIRECTOR OF THE GOH'S OFFICIAL MOUTHPIECE BUT IS CHIEF PROPAGANDIST AND FORMER HAND-PICKED PRESIDENT OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY. ANTICIPATING THE PRESIDENT'S PRONOUNCEMENTS ON RECONCILIATION, HARMONY AND UNITY, FARDIN MADE A BOLD MOVE IN THE GAME OF JOURNALISTIC BRINKMANSHIP, A GAME AT WHICH HE EXCELS. THE REACTION OF THE PUBLIC HAS BEEN OVERWHELMINGLY FAVORABLE. THE OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT RADIO STATION, RADIO NATIONALE, BROADCAST THE FIRST EDITORIAL AND, IN HIS SECOND SERIES, FARDIN CHIDED
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SAINT-LOUIS FOR NOT BEING AS PROGRESSIVE AND OPEN AS HIS OFFICIAL MEDIA COUNTERPART. RADIO HAITI-INTER AND LEADING RADIO METROPOLE ALSO REFERRED TO THE DISPUTE IN THEIR NEWSCASTS, LENDING THEIR SUPPORT TO LE PETIT SAMEDI SOIR. A HIGHLY PLACED GOH OFFICIAL TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER SEPTEMBER 26 THAT THE FEUD HAS BECOME A "CAUSE CELEBRE" AND THAT IT IS BEING TALKED ABOUT MORE THAN THE CELEBRATION ITSELF. SAINT-LOUIS' ACTIONS, HE SAID, ARE REGARDED BY MOST OBJECTIVE OBSERVERS AS THE "DYING GASPS OF A DESPERATE OLD GUARD LOYALIST WHO HAS LUTLIVED HIS USEFULNESS."

7. FARDIN IS NOT LIKELY TO BE INTIMIDATED. RATHER, IN THE CONTEXT OF NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND THE RECENT VISIT OF AMBASSADOR YOUNG, HE AND SYMPATHETIC, NON-ESTABLISHMENT MEDIA MAY FEEL FURTHER PROTECTED--BY U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS AND GOH LIBERALIZATION--AND EMBOLDENED. INDEPENDENT AND SOLVENT, LE PETIT SAMEDI SOIR IS FREE FROM THE PRESSURES OF GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIES THAT INFLUENCE THE OUTPUT OF THE MAJOR DAILIES. OUTSPOKEN WEEKLY JEUNE PRESSE, WHICH ADOPTED A MORE DERERENTIAL EDITORIAL LINE LAST SPRING, MAY ALSO FEEL ENCOURAGED TO REVERT TO ITS FORMER APPROACH OF FAINT PRAISE MIXED WITH HARD-HITTING CRITICISM, PARTICULARLY IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS AREA. AND CROSS-PLAY

BY RADIO HAITI-INTER, RADIO METROPOLE, RADIO LUMIERE AND
EVEN RADIO NATIONALE WILL ENSURE AN INTENSIFIED DIALOGUE.
IT MAY BE TOO EARLY TO DISCERN THE EFFECTS OF THIS NEW,
OPEN DEBATE ON NATIONAL POLITICS AND BASIC FREEDOMS.
WHAT WILL BE THE FATE, FOR EXAMPLE, OF OUTMOED SYCOPHANTS
LIKE SAINT-LOUIS WHO ALSO RISK BEING "UNMASKED" BY A MORE
AGRESSIVE PRESS? BUT THE ESSENTIAL FACT REMAINS THAT A
GREAT LEAP FORWARD HAS BEEN TAKEN IN HAITI'S EVOLUTION
TOWARD PRESS FREEDOM. IT IS AN EVOLUTION WHOSE MARCH WILL
BE DIFFICULT INDEED TO SLOW, AND ONE WHICH CAN ONLY
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CONTRIBUTE TO AN ACCELERATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IMPROVEMENTS
IN HAITI.
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